

# Critiquing Photos at the U3A Digital Photography Group

# Thank you.....

First of all, many thanks to all of you for entering the challenges and submitting photos !

The group is much better when you take part – otherwise you'll just have my photos to look at !! 😊

It is important that everyone should feel confident about submitting their photos to the group.

So, I would like to explain how I would like us to review each other's photos.....



# The U3A Photo Group is different... We're just "Happy Snappers" ....

We don't want anyone to leave because of comments about their work.

We want the group to be a group of "Happy Snappers", who enjoy their photography.

Although some members are better/more experienced, no-one is perfect and we are all still learning.

The point of the U3A is we share our knowledge and experience, to help everyone improve and to have a good time.



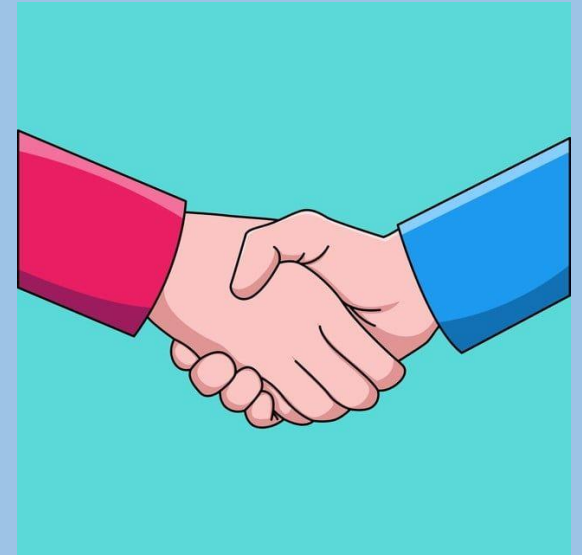
# A promise and a request.....

I promise not to alter any images that you send me –  
What You Send Is What You'll Get !!

It's great to receive your images, but please could you  
keep to the number of images requested ?

This is to ensure we have enough time to see  
everyone's photos.

Thank you !



# Feedback can hurt.....

The problem is we invest something of ourselves into our photos.

We've spent time composing them, selecting, editing, refining...so they are our work.

When we receive criticism, it is easy to feel hurt personally 😞

Particularly, if we feel the comments are harsh, wrong or unfair

Repeated criticism can make people want to give up, or to leave.

We are also our own worse critics.

We can tell ourselves our photos are not very good, or not worth sharing. We all need the help of other group members to counteract these negative thoughts.



# Criticism or Critique ?

While both criticism and critiquing are forms of feedback, there are differences between them in intent and in execution.

Criticism seeks to tear a person down, while **critique seeks to help them improve.**

Criticism focuses on the critic's goals, while **critique is motivated by the intention to serve the creator's goals.**

Criticism is judgmental and focused on placing blame, while **critique is descriptive and focused on finding solutions.**

**Critique is sometimes called "Constructive Criticism".**



# What is a Photo Critique?

To critique means to **give specific feedback based on your experience, with a view to helping the photographer improve their photography.**

**It's not "list the things you don't like about their image".**

**Nor is it "tell the photographer how you would have taken the shot (better)".**

**And don't tell them "their gear is wrong/not good enough".**

**Finding things that are "wrong" with a photo is easier than looking at the photo as a whole, deciding what you like and then picking one or two things that you think could improve it.**

If it helps, use the term "Image Review" instead of Critique.

See it as another chance to re-visit and re-analyse our images.

# So when we share photos.....



- We all need to support each other, so always look for and say supportive things about the photos
- Unless someone asks for feedback on their photo, avoid making any critical comments
- Always make your comments about the image, not the person taking it
- Avoid saying “You should have”, “You could have”, “I would have”
- If you break these rules, I will ask you to moderate your comments.
- If you continue to do this, I will have to ask you to leave the group.

**PS – this guidance applies to me too !**

# Photo Critique – remember it's just opinion

We can only learn from critique if we understand that **it is just opinion**.

Listening to comments, analysing them and seeing if we can understand why they might be valid are all good things to do but **keep them in perspective !**

Stay true to yourself and the work you want to produce.

We should all be confident in ourselves to follow whatever creative path we wish.

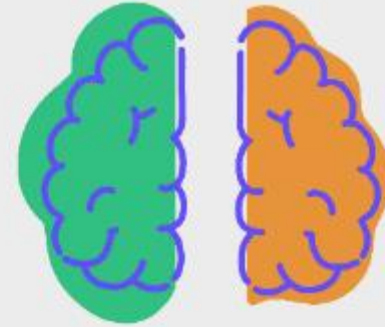
Our work should please us first and foremost.

**As long as we are happy with our images and feel our work is improving and going in the right direction, then that is all that matters.**



## Left Brain VS Right Brain

Logical  
Analytical  
Linear  
Verbal  
Factual  
Sequential



Creative  
Intuitive  
Artistic  
Non-verbal  
Emotional  
Imaginative

Finding things that are wrong is easier...

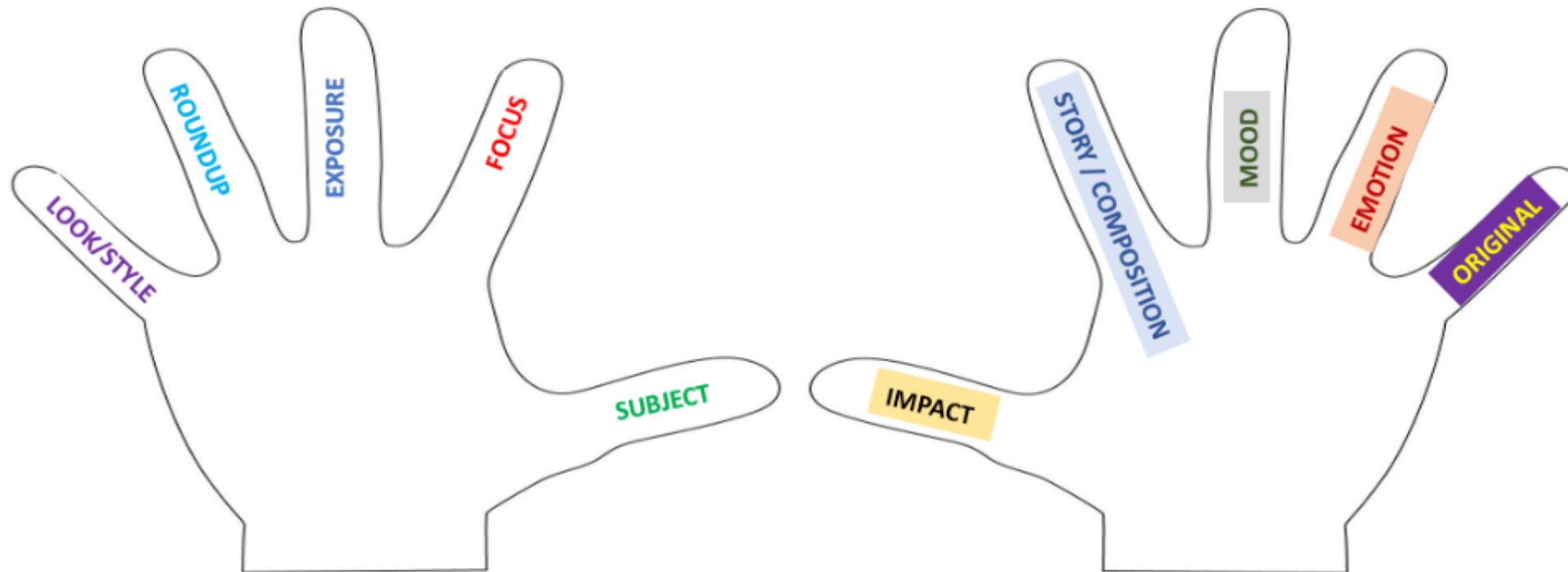
*The left hemisphere of the brain is the analytical side*

# My hands method....

## Things to Consider when Critiquing Photos

### TECHINCAL / SKILLS

### CREATIVITY / ARTISTIC



# Checking for errors : Subject

The first thing to check is if there is a clear subject in the image.

When you review the image for the first time, do you immediately know where the photographer wants you to look ?

There are many ways for an image to make the subject clear including:

- Use shallow depth of field so only the subject is in sharp focus.
- Use lighting so the subject is highlighted and stands out.
- Make the subject the largest, most prominent, thing in the image.
- Use a leading line to guide your eye to the subject.
- Keep it simple. If there is only one thing in the photo, it makes the subject clear.



# Checking for errors : Focus

The next thing to check is if the subject is in focus.

An image which is out of focus cannot be easily adjusted/corrected afterwards.

## Common causes of blur

- The shutter speed is too slow / the subject is moving.
- Camera shake – again, this is worse with a slower shutter speed.
- Using Auto focus, but the camera choosing the wrong subject (area of the image).
- Using Manual focus, but not getting it pinpoint sharp.



# Checking for errors : Exposure

We've talked recently about exposure. In most cases, your photos will contain bright (white) and dark (black) areas. The camera exposure-meter expects this and the settings it chooses are designed to have a mix of tones in the image.

## Common causes of wrong exposure

- Taking a photo towards the sun/light, or in a very dark room.
- If the sun is behind the subject, this is called backlit and can lead to silhouettes.
- The camera setting makes the subject too light/dark because of their clothes/background.
- Poor choice of position/angle/perspective by the photographer.
- Incorrect use of flash.



# Checking for errors : Roundup - the Edges

Look around the edges of the image. Are there any distracting elements ?

If you spot one when on location (during image playback), move to a new position and re-take the shot.

If you only spot it afterwards, try to crop out the distraction.



## Examples

- Distracting colours / lights
- Parts of other people / animals visible on the edge
- Distracting signs / trees / power lines



# Checking for errors : Roundup - Clutter

Another mistake we can make is trying to include too much in the image.

We want to show everything in a scene, but the subject gets lost and the result can be confusing.

Ask yourself if there is stuff there that doesn't need to be in the image, stuff that isn't adding to the composition, or the story ?

There may even be stuff that is drawing the viewer's eye away from the subject, or even cutting into it.



# Checking for errors : Roundup - Cropping

Cropping can recover many a poor image by helping to de-clutter and clarify the subject. It can also be used as a sort of “zoom”, to enlarge subjects.

However, be careful not to over-crop !

## Examples of poor cropping

- Subject too close to edges (unbalanced image).
- Chopping off parts of people/animals.
- Pixelated images (zoomed in too far).



# Checking for errors : Roundup - Background

Similar to checking the edges, remember to also check the background of your image for distractions !



# Checking for errors : Look/Style

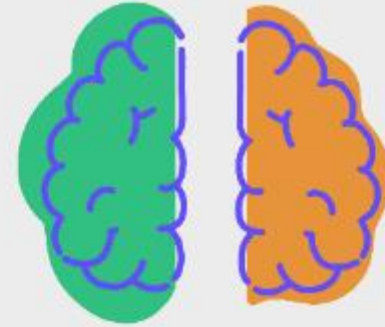
Lastly, is the style/look of the image appropriate for the subject ?

- Black and White images bring out tones and textures.
- Colours can affect our emotions !
- Strong contrasts suit strong subjects.
- Low contrast images suit a dreamy landscape.



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Looking at the photo as a whole is harder...

*The right hemisphere of the brain is the creative, artistic side*

# Looking at the whole photo

## Initial Questions To Ask When First Viewing an Image

- What about this image that makes it stand out from other similar types of images?
- What is about this image that caught your eye?
- Is there something about this image that makes you wonder “How’d they do that?”
- How is the eye led around the image?

....How does the image make you feel ?

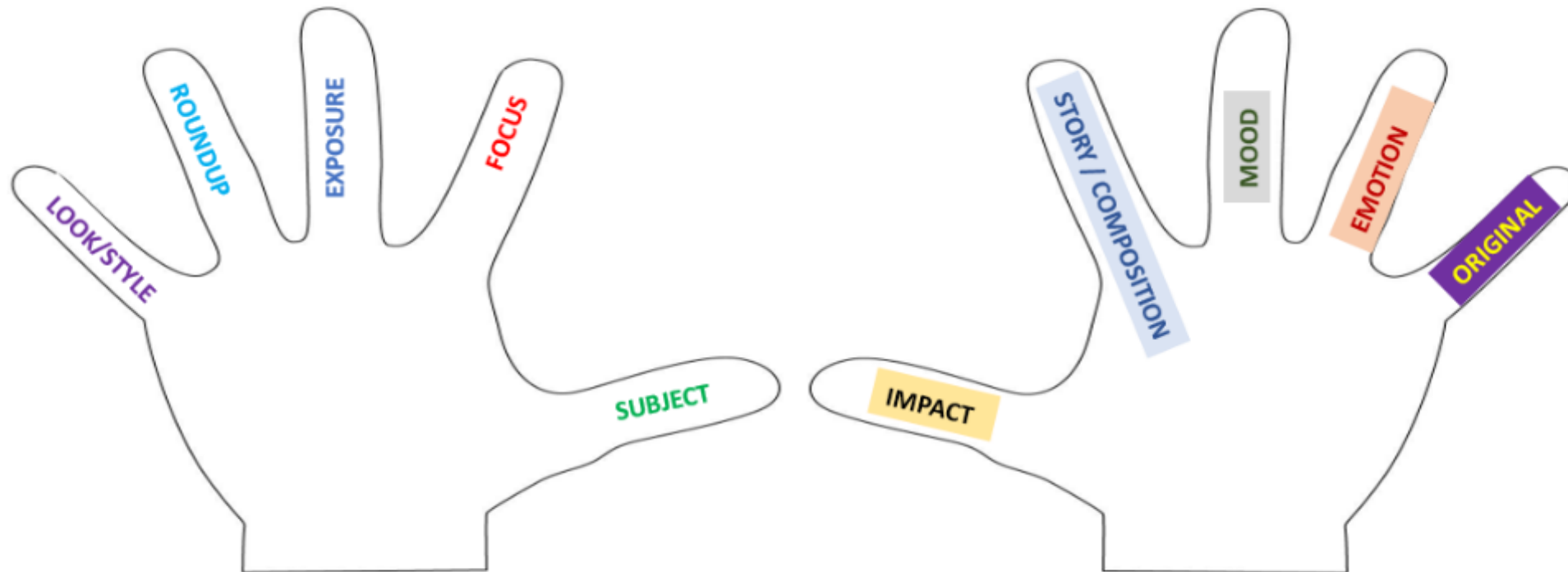


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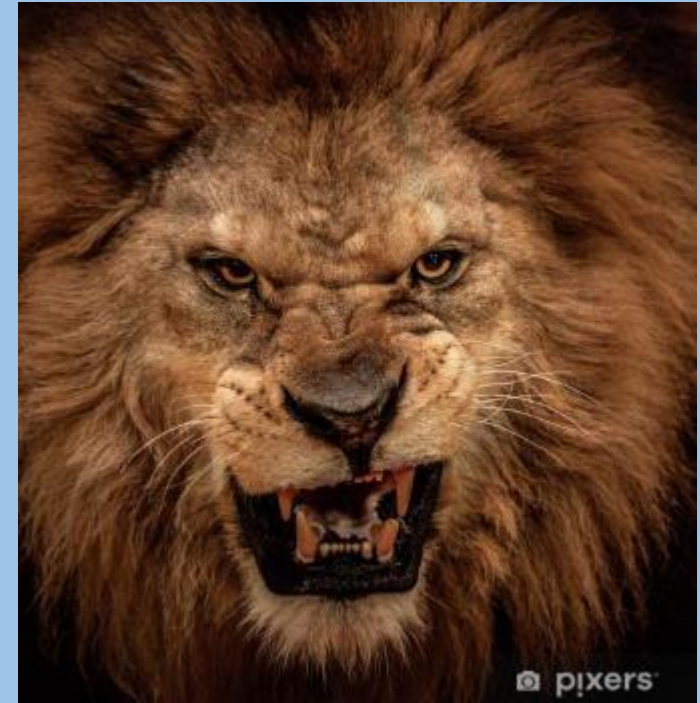
# Making up our minds in 3 seconds

Humans normally make up their minds about something very quickly. It is said you decide if you like someone within 3 seconds !

We also can make up our minds quickly about an image. Those images with strong impact hit us like a punch to the face. “Impact” is that feeling we get upon viewing an image for the first time.

Images with strong impact can evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion.

Not every image has to have strong impact. Sometimes we prefer a restful image !



# Telling a story

Another important word you want to think about when reviewing photos is – WHY.

Why did the photographer take this photo?

What does it say to the viewer?

Is there a message or story that you can see?

Think about concepts – it could be that the story is love, or sadness, or peacefulness.

It can also be an idea or a feeling, not a thing or person.



# Mood and Emotional connections

Mood is what brings the photograph alive.

Mood can be almost as important as the subject matter. The choice of the subject “tells” you but the mood makes you “feel.”

Warm-toned images create a relaxed, inviting feeling.

A blue-toned image creates a colder, less-inviting impression. It can be used to add an element of foreboding, grittiness, or mystery.



# Mood and Emotional connections

For me, the mood of the image is all about the setting/style and how it makes you feel.

There is obviously a strong overlap between the mood and with our emotional connection to an image.

However, in my view, strong emotional connections don't require a specific mood to occur.

Usually, we form the strongest emotional connections to images of people, or to places and things we recognise/love.



# Originality

Original images are those which are taken of unusual subjects, from an unusual angle/perspective or which use unusual combinations of light and colour.

**Original images engage our interest for longer** – they make us look twice !

I am always surprised by how different our images are, even when we visit the same place and shoot the same subjects.

So we are all capable of seeing an original/different view.



# Summing up - giving each other feedback

It's ok to look at the image and form an opinion quickly.

**But before you say anything, ask yourself why do I feel this way ?**

Take a bit longer to look at the image and re-consider.

Look for technical errors in your own images, especially when on location/playing back the image.

**But please be forgiving of others. Errors are not always easy to spot !**

When you speak say, I like (or dislike) the image because..

**Please try to be constructive. Find something positive about the image.**

**Remember, it's just your opinion ! What we like, others may not and vice versa.**

